

Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution

John Howard Yoder

Theodore J. Koontz
and Andy Alexis-Baker, editors



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Editors' Preface

The topic of this book occupied the lion's share of John Howard Yoder's time as a scholar, teacher, and ecumenical conversationalist. In one sense his attention to war and peace was inevitable. Given the variety of wars and peacemaking challenges the world faced during his lifetime, it would have been difficult for a Mennonite pacifist theologian/ethicist/historian to avoid addressing Christian perspectives on war, peace, and revolution. But Yoder addressed the subject with an intensity, consistency, and duration that can only be accounted for by acknowledging his passion for the subject.¹ This topic touched the heart of his Christian faith. He was a devoted and tireless evangelist and apologist for a faithful (and therefore, in Yoder's view, pacifist) reading of the Christian story—in the Bible, and through the church's first two millennia. He believed that this story is good news and wanted others to believe and live it. The central question, implicit or explicit, he asks about movements discussed in this book is, to what extent do Jesus's teaching, life, death, and resurrection shape their convictions? His unapologetic commitment to a faithful, pacifist reading of the gospel is evident in these pages. It caused him to notice things that frequently go unnoticed, and to see in a different light things that others frequently do notice.

Yoder knew that there is no objective ground on which to stand to view Christian theology and Christian history. But the reader should not draw the conclusion that this book is ideological or polemical. As part of his Christian pacifism and his scholarly vocation, Yoder wanted to represent various perspectives fairly by stating them in their strongest forms and pushing himself

1. Yoder was deeply engaged in debates around Christians, war, and peace for his entire adult life. Already in the 1950s he was a key figure in ecumenical conversations on war and peace in Europe, and he taught the course out of which this book grows almost annually from 1966 through the fall semester of 1997.

and others to encounter the force of the case they make for their stance. With empathy, he sought to bring into the conversation Christians who hold views that were absent in his classroom, either because those Christians were strangers from earlier centuries and other parts of the world, or because they were enemies holding views antithetical to those of his listeners. The reader can judge whether he succeeds, but he clearly saw this task as part of his scholarly and Christian pacifist commitment.² He described movements within Christian history, illuminating their contexts and commitments to show how they came to be what they were. Yoder came at this history with an awareness of how Anabaptist history has been distorted by mainline Protestant and Catholic histories. He therefore sought to breathe life into historical movements, to see as they might have seen. He invites us to understand and respect them in their particular historical contexts, whether or not we agree with them.

In stating other perspectives in their strongest form, a surprising history unfolds. For Yoder, the history of Christian attitudes toward war and peace is clearly not a mainstream account that sees the church faithfully responding to the gospel by outgrowing its early pacifism, maturing and coming to accept responsibility, including the need to wage war. But neither is it a story of simple decline from the New Testament to the Anabaptists, as some within Yoder's Mennonite tradition have told it. The most striking aspects of this story are the resilience through the centuries of the gospel of peace, and the abiding power of Jesus's hold on people that invites them to imitate him in seeking peace and shunning violence. Again and again, Yoder demonstrates, people throughout history have seen Jesus,³ and have been drawn to the power of the cross.

In telling this history, Yoder goes beyond understanding and presenting various perspectives. He evaluates and criticizes them. He is often direct and sharp in analyzing views, including aspects of his own tradition, that he finds wanting. His favorable treatment of diaspora Judaism, for example, challenges both nonpacifist and pacifist readings of the church's story. And by noting repeatedly the ways Christians have unquestioningly supported the wars of their rulers, he challenges nonpacifists at least to take seriously the constraints embodied in the justifiable war tradition. His Christian pacifist scholarship requires that he fairly represent various traditions, but it does not mean that he sees all viewpoints as equally true.

2. See Yoder's introduction to this book. Elsewhere he claims that it is the historian's responsibility to exercise an "axiomatic nonviolence . . . toward the defenseless dignity of the story back then" (John Howard Yoder, "The Burden and the Discipline of Evangelical Revisionism," in *Nonviolent America: History through the Eyes of Peace*, ed. Louise Hawkey and James Juhnke [North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1993], 28).

3. See John Howard Yoder, "But Do We See Jesus?: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth," in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 46–62.

Yoder's creativity enriches our hearing of the story. He asks whether the standard way of posing a question is most helpful. He prods us to step outside our comfortable ways of seeing in order to look at things from another angle. He examines nooks and crannies of history that often remain unexplored. He challenges assumptions, and he asks us to challenge our assumptions—and his.

The place of this book in Yoder's writings

This book examines the historical development of Christian perspectives on war and peace from the second century to about 1980. How did various types of views emerge?⁴ How did they evolve? What contexts give rise to different perspectives on war? In this book these are central questions, together with questions of assessment: What strengths and weaknesses of various views come into focus as we trace their histories? How do they line up with the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

This book is distinguished from most of Yoder's other books in that it was originally presented as lectures in a class with the same title.⁵ This course had a long history. While an undergraduate at Goshen College, in the second semester of the 1945–46 school year, Yoder took a course from Guy Hershberger on "War, Peace, and Nonresistance." Twenty years later, Yoder inherited the course from Hershberger and taught it in the spring of 1966 at the Mennonite seminaries. A few years later Yoder changed the title to "Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution"; he was also teaching the course at the University of Notre Dame by 1973.⁶ Yoder last taught the course in the fall of 1997, just before his death on December 30 of that year. The continuity over those

4. The theologian or ethicist engaged in a critical and a constructive task must find ways of making sense of the almost infinite variety of historical data. In this task Yoder found it useful to identify types of positions. He scoured Christian history and sought to identify these types: typical, recurring patterns that have a common logic or shape. Such classification is useful for understanding and for teaching. At the same time, Yoder was wary of rigid boxes that distort or reduce the complexity and variety in a particular historical movement and minimize significant differences between movements given the same label or assigned to the same type. His book *Nevertheless* (see the general bibliography for more information) is a typology of the type known as pacifism; in it Yoder suggests there are at least twenty-nine types of pacifism. He was sensitive to the fact that typologies can be used to unfairly simplify certain types, strengthening one's preferred view by misrepresenting—or even doing violence to—others' views. See his critique of H. Richard Niehbur's *Christ and Culture* typology: "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 31–89.

5. Yoder's *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002) had the same origin.

6. See the syllabus in the John Howard Yoder Collection, Hist. Mss. 1–48, Box 188, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, IN, MCA-G.

thirty years is remarkable. The topics remained much the same throughout the years, though sometimes ordered differently and with occasional adaptations to suit his audience.⁷

In the early 1970s Yoder's class sessions were recorded and transcribed. In subsequent years the transcriptions were made available for students to read, so that class time could be devoted primarily to discussion. Yoder's last redaction of these lectures was a 1983 text, in what Yoder called a "nonbook book" that was sold from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) bookstore and later from the Cokesbury Bookstore at Duke Divinity School.⁸ The present book is based on that compilation, which had been only lightly edited.

Because this book grew out of a course at AMBS, it opens a window on what Yoder thought future Mennonite leaders needed to know and ponder. In a sense, the original audience for this book is closer to his home than is the audience for many of his writings.

How the nonbook book came to be this book

Yoder occasionally talked about writing a book that would incorporate much that was in the 1983 volume, but which would be more tightly edited, more comprehensive and up-to-date, more fully documented, and shorter. For a variety of reasons, he never undertook this task. One reason was the difficulty of simultaneously accomplishing all these objectives. An additional complication was the relationship of this book to Roland Bainton's *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, which Yoder used as a text in his class alongside his transcribed lectures. He did not want to compete with Bainton's book while it was still in print by writing a replacement for it. He intentionally treated more briefly those subjects that Bainton had dealt with in depth, and spoke more fully about topics that Bainton had touched more lightly. Nevertheless, in a handwritten note, evidently written soon after the lectures were printed in 1983, Yoder stated, "In view of the uncertain future availability of Bainton's book, these texts have been so edited as to be readable standing alone."⁹ While he recognized that his nonbook book was thinner on some topics than others, the same was true of Bainton's volume—and of any historical/theological work.

7. In later years, for example, Yoder included more work on Catholic peace initiatives for his students at Notre Dame.

8. John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Co-op Bookstore, 1983). This volume is in the AMBS library (and a number of other academic libraries) for any scholars who want to go back behind the editing we have done in the present book. No library, to our knowledge, has copies of previous editions which we drew from to restore the text where material was left out of the 1983 volume.

9. John Howard Yoder Collection, Hist. Mss. 1–48, Box 188, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, IN, MCA-G.

When Yoder left AMBS in the mid-1980s, I (Ted Koontz) assumed responsibility for teaching the course that Hershberger and Yoder had developed. After Yoder's death in 1997, I continued to use parts of the 1983 volume. But through the years I realized that while the nonbook book contained a great deal of valuable history and analysis, many students struggled with it. Awkward sentences, repetitive sections, poor or missing transitions, an unappealing format, irrelevant student questions, and supplemental readings made the going even more difficult than a serious theological work needs to be. I came to believe that editing the volume would enhance its value to students and other readers. It was not until the fall of 2005, however, that the opportunity to begin work on the project presented itself. Two graduate students at AMBS, Andy Alexis-Baker and Keith Benner, approached me about working together to edit the lectures. Although Keith Benner's untimely death kept him from seeing the task through, Andy and I undertook the long process of editing Yoder's lectures into their present form.

The present book is nearly 40 percent shorter than the 1983 volume. A significant part of that reduction was achieved by eliminating supplemental readings by other authors. We also eliminated two chapters near the end, one a listing of leading contemporary pacifists and their writings, and the other a description of "loose ends"—topics that Yoder could not include because of lack of time and space. We deleted student questions and Yoder's responses to them when we judged them tangential to the topic of the chapter or when they evoked answers that repeated ideas presented elsewhere.¹⁰ Finally, we significantly reduced the length of the volume simply by carefully eliminating unnecessary (we hope!) words, phrases, asides, sentences, and paragraphs. We have tried to achieve a good balance between its informal spoken origin in a classroom and what seems fitting in a scholarly written work, and between getting to the point and taking time to develop a point. We have moved materials around in some places, in an effort to make the book flow more smoothly. We have sought to avoid distorting Yoder's meaning, either in what we eliminated from the text or in how we edited the text.

We made three main additions to the text. We inserted headings and sub-headings to make the book easier to navigate. We also replaced Yoder's original chapter on "Quakerism in Early America: The Holy Experiment." In its place we used material from a transcription of a 1974 lecture, supplemented with some content from the 1983 volume; the approach Yoder had used in the 1974 class was easier to follow. Finally, we added some material found in a 1979 edition of this text: to the end of chapter 7 we added 1979 material on *jus in*

10. Initially we planned to include some of the student questions and Yoder's answers, in order to retain more of the original oral feel. In the end, however, it seemed best in some cases to include in new sections Yoder's ideas that emerged in response to questions (but without stating the question). In other cases it worked best to include elsewhere in the text parts of answers; in those cases we either supplemented or replaced other text.

bello, and to the beginning of chapter 8 we added several pages from the 1979 text on the evolution of the justifiable war tradition.

When we began this project, we considered updating its contents, at least by referring to related works by Yoder and perhaps even by incorporating excerpts from some of those works. Incorporating excerpts soon proved to be unworkable, however; many of his writings are related to themes addressed here, and incorporating them would have expanded an already lengthy book. In addition, the original text is set in the period of the 1970s and early 1980s, and in some cases later excerpts would have given the book a less coherent historical context. In the end we inserted only a bare minimum of references to later writings, only those relating directly and substantially to the chapters here. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Yoder's thought on many issues addressed here continued to develop until his death, although its trajectory remained constant.¹¹

Because the materials here originated as lectures, Yoder rarely included detailed documentation for the resources from which he drew. The general bibliography and the study guides provide the reader with references to the pool of literature he relied on. We have found, footnoted, and verified many specific references, but the book is not documented in as much detail as the book Yoder dreamed of writing would have been. In addition, the original text had no footnotes. We have moved some of Yoder's tangential comments and references into footnotes.

Audience

We envision two primary audiences for the book. One is college and seminary students studying Christian ethics—especially, of course, the ethics of war and peace. We hope we have produced a usable textbook. The second set of readers is people interested in the thought of John Howard Yoder. This book contains an important part of his intellectual legacy. Although he did not have the opportunity to polish this volume for publication, his understandings of the history and types of Christian views on war and peace that are developed here illuminate and provide depth to many of his more strictly theological writings. In fact, it is difficult to understand Yoder correctly without understanding how he viewed Christian history as it relates to these themes. In addition, the course from which this book is derived is one Yoder taught almost annually throughout his long career. He clearly saw this particular agenda as central to his calling.

11. Readers wishing to locate other materials by Yoder should check Mark Nation, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, Goshen College, 1997); and Mark Nation, "Supplement to 'A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder,'" in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 472–91.

Thanks

Barbara Nelson Gingerich, managing editor at Institute of Mennonite Studies at AMBS, expertly copyedited the text, bringing to the task not only her skill as an editor but her theological training and knowledge of Yoder's thought that began when she was a student in his classes. Thanks also to the Institute of Mennonite Studies for allowing her to include this project in her various tasks. Lee Camp, who was Yoder's assistant for the course at Notre Dame near the end of Yoder's life, sent us valuable material that helped us see the course's continuity. Mark Thiessen Nation provided a 1979 edition of the text, which allowed us to compare it with the 1983 text. Without this 1979 edition, we would not have been able to see that chapters were sometimes essentially three lectures, compiled without much editing. We also discovered materials in the 1979 volume that we have incorporated into this book, particularly the *jus in bello* material in chapter 7 and the first several pages of chapter 8.

Our thanks to Martha Yoder Maust, Tom Yoder Neufeld, Michael Cartwright, and Mark Nation—managers of Yoder's literary estate—who encouraged us to undertake the work of editing this book. In addition, we offer our gratitude to Annie Yoder for her gentle encouragement to us and for her part in allowing John Howard Yoder to be the scholar he was. We extend our gratitude to Rodney Clapp of Brazos Press, whose commitment to publishing this book remained steadfast even when we informed him with some trepidation that the text would be long despite our trimming. We are grateful to Glen Stassen, who read a draft of our manuscript and made helpful suggestions and corrections. Nekeisha Alexis-Baker provided helpful comments on the initial editing process and offered encouragement along the way. And we are grateful that AMBS is a context in which the topic dealt with here is given high priority; specifically, the seminary has given me (Ted) the opportunity to teach this material and time to edit it.

Finally, we are especially grateful to our mentor and friend, John Yoder. Working through this material again has been a powerful and inspiring reminder both of the range and creativity of his scholarship and of his devotion to his servant Lord, Jesus Christ. Our hope is that the perspectives offered here on the history of Christian attitudes to war and peace will deepen readers' commitment to understanding the gospel more fully and following Jesus more closely.

—2008

Author's Preface

The materials published here originated as a teaching tool, a study resource for graduate students in the history of Christian thought and contemporary social ethics. My intent was to provide the historical background students would need before they could proceed to do original thinking on issues of war and peace. The perspective from which I read the story is that of the historic peace church traditions, with more attention to Anabaptist and Mennonite history than to that of the Friends, and still less to that of the Brethren.

This material developed as a supplement to Roland Bainton's *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, a monumental orientation to the history of Christian thought on the subject.¹ This project reproduces the substance of a course on Christian attitudes toward war, peace, and revolution that I have taught to several generations of students at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. The course consisted of a conversation with major written resources, including *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*. Because this book supplements an existing text, the person who reads it alone may find it uneven.²

The conversational form of this material is not merely a freer way to lead a class, or a lazier way to edit a book; it also reflects the open-ended nature of the subject matter and the unfinished quality of some discussions.

The informal style allows for another kind of freedom. Some sections of the story I recount neutrally or descriptively, as a historian of Christian thought. In others I argue explicitly with both sides of the debate, which are represented

1. See the general bibliography.

2. Where Bainton's work gives a topic less attention (for example, nineteenth-century restoration movements or early Pentecostals), I present the subject as if providing the student's principal access to it. Where Bainton's treatment is more complete, and the historical background is more widely known, this text is skimpy. Seldom do I debate with the way Bainton interpreted his material.

fairly, I trust, but with no pretense to neutrality. I take this approach especially where the political relevance of the Christian peace position is now under the shadow of systematic theological categories that I view as inappropriate. Examples are the sections on the “holy experiment” in Pennsylvania and the treatment of disagreements about the differences between Anabaptists and Quakers at their origins, the twentieth-century discussion about the pragmatic effectiveness of nonviolence, and the brief examination of biblical materials. In each of those cases, my biases are not one side of a debate. Instead I call for criticism of the terms in which the debate has been carried on by both sides. In these cases, I seek first to report on and referee the debate itself, and then to suggest how a more adequate analysis of the issues could move beyond it. If the claim were that this material is an objective textbook or a balanced research syllabus, this unevenness would be a shortcoming. For most readers, I trust that it will not be.

This text grows out of a specific Mennonite denominational identity, and I have retained references to denominational location while recognizing that the text may be used by non-Mennonites.

Since the publication of the Bainton volume, several excellent and accessible collections of primary sources on Christian attitudes to war and peace have appeared. They improve the reader's ability to verify but also to complement the summaries by Bainton and by me. In many chapters I refer readers to relevant portions of these sources, but I have made no effort to ensure that the chapter itself refers to the content of all those sources. This text will aid learning best when readers take account of related sources, with this work serving as a thread leading through that wider material. The exception is my treatment of some of the experiences of Friends and Mennonites, where it can stand alone.

Since work on these materials first began, several major new studies have enriched our documentation in the field. Analysis that was appropriate in 1974 may be redundant if the reader is acquainted with those more recent and more thorough works. Nonetheless, I have made no effort to purge from this outline discussions that overlap with, for instance, the more recent work of Millard Lind³ or Jean-Michel Hornus.⁴

The basic outline, following Bainton's book, is chronological. I refer to scripture only as Christians of different epochs perceive its relevance differently. The same is true of the treatment of the tools of systematic ethics. I interrupt chronological tracking occasionally when our understanding of a topic, such as the just war tradition, increases because we pursue it over a longer time

3. Millard Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980).

4. Jean-Michel Hornus, *It Is Not Lawful for Me to Fight: Early Christian Attitudes Toward War, Violence, and the State*, trans. Alan Kreider and Oliver Coburn (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980).

span. The treatment is intentionally short on biographical detail. The bibliography does not pretend to be up-to-date or full. Nor have I made any effort at elegance. The various chapters are not all the same size. The topics are not treated at the same depth. Sources are not cited with equal thoroughness.

I am grateful to the students who participated in various offerings of this class and to those who made the recordings and the transcriptions of the class sessions.

—1983

1



Introduction

Historical theology

We are working in the realm of historical theology, and in the first instance, ours is a descriptive task. Christians have taken many attitudes to war, peace, and revolution. We need to study and interpret each in its own historical context, for its own sake, and as historians of Christian thought, objectively. The task of reading a story objectively is not without problems, but at the outset we will seek to be historians and not apologetes.

History of ideas

The history we study here is the history of ideas, not of events. The real story of the Crusades, for example, would be an account of what those wars meant humanly, to killers and those killed. Narratives of how wars have been fought, or the story of military science—strategies, weapons, civilian involvement, the experience of being a soldier—are matters we will not study for their own sake.

Nor will the various options and logical positions be covered with equal intensity. We will give the just war position major attention. We will spend less time on the idea of holy war or the idea of the autonomous state, partly because those ideas are less debatable, less serious as moral options, and the

people who hold them are less open to conversation. Yet we must remember that they remain real options, if not in theology, then in the social experience of many Christian churches. In fact, one of the reasons to be critical of the just war theory, which is careful not to approve of all war, is that in social experience it tends to cover for the other views.

Similarly, we could give more historical attention to the ideas of the historic peace churches. Anabaptists will be dealt with mostly at their point of origin as a model from the sixteenth century, with little attention to later migration or to their experiences with conscientious objection. We will consider the Quakers at the beginning of their experience, first in Britain and then in Pennsylvania. Other peace churches we will observe even less. We will devote little space to late twentieth-century ferment around the war question, with regard either to nuclear weapons or to the Vietnam experience. We will give little attention to serious interdisciplinary crossover in conversation with political science, although we cannot avoid some discussion of the concept of the state. We will make little effort to carry through interdisciplinary dialogue with sociology and psychology as related to conflict and aggression in groups or in personality, although that cross-reference will at least be noted.

One early section is devoted to pre-Constantinian Christianity, but we will not begin by looking at what the Bible says about war and peace. We can never read the Bible without doing so from a particular perspective. We will seek to be accountable about the perspective from which we read the Bible by not beginning there but by first seeking a wider experience with more questions. Then we will be more self-aware and will develop a wider agenda and a more precise vocabulary with which to return to the biblical material. If the pre-Constantinian church was pacifist, the New Testament was pacifist; there is little doubt about that fact. But our questions about how to understand that fact, how to relate it to earlier Old Testament perspectives and to later developments of Christian thought, will be more articulate if we deal with the Bible after we have seen something of the subsequent development of the story.

We need to consider one more general caution about the strengths and weaknesses of the particular denominational context in which we are working. Most Christians hold views about war different from those represented by me as a teacher in a North American Mennonite seminary and by many of my students. We have a special duty to be critically accountable, to use imagination, research, and experience in order to bring the perspectives of the absent to bear on our material. This exercise is imperative for any honest intellectual work. It is also an integral part of a nonviolent commitment to respect the dignity of the adversary, and especially of absent adversaries who cannot defend themselves. Let us therefore be self-critical about the narrowness of the composition of our group. Every time we can consciously do so, let us compensate by double-checking whether we have heard—and have properly and creatively understood—the views we are dealing with.

The problem of bias

Let us admit the general problem of bias in the study of history. History begins as apology. When people record events, especially when they retell events to one another or to their children, they are acting out of a need to make sense of how things happened, how those events contribute to defining who they are. Remembering matters because memory constitutes identity. So the fundamental anthropological function of telling one's story is inseparable from bias. Rarely is the particular bias that of repentance. More often it is the bias of reproach addressed to others, combined with defense of oneself and one's group.

With the passage of time, with awareness of the multiplicity of perspectives, and with development of greater temporal and emotional distance from one's own starting identity, heirs to a tradition become more concerned about the objectivity of the story and the verifiability of the particular items recounted. The concern for objectivity makes history a discipline. We develop ways of testing our sources to know whether they are credible, and ways of testing how we read the sources to know whether we have taken them seriously as the product of their own context rather than of ours. Thus procedures, checklists, and questions emerge, which enable us to engage in a critique of our own apologetic bias about the past.

But despite the desire to be less subjective, less prejudiced, the claim to be objective can never be absolutized. Neutrality itself is no less a bias. The concern to step away from this or that commitment is itself a commitment. It puts blinders on one's capacity to observe certain dimensions of what the story actually was. Those who simply claim objectivity, who believe that they can read the story with pure objectivity, as it really happened, are thereby less capable of self-critical self-transcendence than are readers who acknowledge their identity (which is a kind of bias) and then correct for it.

For North American Mennonite seminary students, the story of Christian attitudes toward the problems of war and peace, violence and revolution, is retold because of a concern arising out of one Christian tradition over against others. It is a minority tradition, which helps explain why the subject is so interesting to us and which sharpens our perception for some critical perspectives on the story. Even before we start the rereading, we have determined what seems to be the most consistent Christian answer to at least most of the questions we will review.

The corrective for this bias is not to seek to be free of bias. To take that route would merely mean looking for some other bias—although it might feel less like a bias, because it might be the bias of the main stream, whether that main stream is identified as historic Roman Catholicism, liberal Protestantism, evangelicalism, or something else. The effort to be less subjective and sectarian by getting out of the narrowness of a peace church commitment is especially tempting because of the normal psychology of adolescence, which

may be characteristic of those of us who grew up in ethnic communities and who feel that the wider world is less prejudiced than the enclave in which we grew up.

We will not make the claim here to be without bias. Nor will we adopt the other easy answer to the question of bias, the answer of some self-styled liberation movements. Such movements assert that partisanship is a good thing and that only prejudice enables the proper reading of history, because history should always be read from a particular prejudice; otherwise, the claimed objectivity means letting oneself be co-opted by the oppressive structures. Rejecting both ideologizing partisanship and the claim to be completely objective, we point to this imperative: to confess clearly the considered commitment of the theological ethics of the historic peace position, and then to build into the telling of the story the correctives that flow from that critical self-awareness.

We should build into the story a special concern to hear the arguments for other views, to sense their power, intellectual or emotional. We should show special concern to give those other views the benefit of the doubt. These views might be espoused by some people who are not morally respectable, but we should not hold that failing against others who adhere to similar views with moral integrity. Finally, the corrective for bias is to engage in a process of testing by conversing with people who hold another view. These mainstream views are present in the literature, in wider society, in the media, and sometimes in our own guilty consciences and conformist reactions

Questions of method in ethics

We turn now to another set of variables. For whom do we do ethics? Christian ethics are for Christians; that much is obvious. But if Christians know what is true and what is evil, is that truth any less true or that evil any less evil for non-Christians? Do we not talk the same language in ethics as our non-Christian neighbors? Can we talk with them? Within a democracy, can we make decisions together with them? And if we can, what criteria do we use? Do we need to filter and adapt our ethical commitments so that other people can understand them, respect them, follow them, or apply them? Or, in spelling out definitions derived from our faith, do we pay attention only to those people who share our value judgments? If not, what other guides do we have that are not derived from those judgments? The issue of how to transcend the particularity of truth claims rooted in Jewish and Christian history is a major theological concern for many of our contemporaries. For some, it is the first question of theological method.

If we were starting from scratch, we would have to face a certain kind of objective approach to the discipline of ethics. Can there be such a thing as ethics at all? Might the value systems of our time be so pluralistic that we lack

any common language? Might a correct value system be so concerned not to impose extraneous values on others that we can say nothing to one another about right and wrong? That position would be agnosticism, a denial that we can know anything worth talking about. Or it would be pluralism, affirming the validity of many different views. Or it would be solipsism: I recognize that nobody else has to listen to me, any more than I have to listen to anyone else. These are forms of challenge to the very possibility of doing ethics.

Assuming we can do ethics, any perusal of a standard text provides evidence that there are different ways of doing ethics. Are we to use principles, or is the word *principle* itself the signal of a bad method? What is the place of tradition? What is the place of common sense? What is the place of the positive statements of church authorities? All these categories and approaches are debatable, but we will not openly or systematically debate these questions here.

Another widespread debate tries to throw light on what we are talking about by making distinctions of level or territory. This approach distinguishes between personal and social ethics, or between spiritual and outward ethics. It tries to reduce the confusion in ethical debate by separating levels—not (so its proponents say) in order to neglect one or the other but in order to deal with one at a time and clarify the priority of one over the other.

Here, where we are discussing violence and war, there is no intrinsic logical reason why we should deal with most of the questions of method that I have just identified—whether there can be ethics, for whom it can be, how it can be structured externally, what it starts with internally, how different areas or dimensions interlock—any more than we would if we were discussing any other ethical issue. But in conversations on the ethics of war and violence, we hear frequent appeals to these matters. Next to sex, killing is the most frequent example used by advocates of situationalism or of principle. Often, when the pacifist says killing is wrong, the conversation partner does not discuss the morality of killing but resorts to one of these other concerns: “Don’t be a legalist.” “Don’t mix the spiritual and the social.” “You are using the wrong kind of reasoning.” Therefore we cannot avoid some encounter with these method questions, although they would most fittingly belong in a separate treatment of the structures of and resources for ethics in general.

The ecumenical relevance of this course

This topic has clear relevance for Mennonites as a historic peace church. The special challenge for us is to reach beyond the obvious sectarian motivation for dealing with it. Rejection of war is not morally right for Mennonites unless we are ready to claim on some level that war is also wrong for others. If we claim that our rejection of war is not a peculiar folkloric distinctive of ethnic Mennonites but a moral obligation, then we cannot rest content with claim-

ing that this is *a* right position. We are obligated morally to communicate it to others who have not yet understood it.

In North America now, Christians tend to justify denominational division by pointing out that each denomination holds particular views. Separate existence on the part of a denomination is warranted, then, because its members hold to special convictions which cannot be implemented if they are swamped within a larger organization that does not hold those positions. Recognizing our distinctive existence, justified by this set of commitments, it follows that we are obligated to be accountable. Anything distinctive about a denomination's identity becomes a missionary mandate which that denomination is morally obligated to clarify in order to share it with others. There is a danger, obviously, in feeling too missionary or too self-righteous about this task. But an even greater danger comes with cultivating a distinctive identity for which one recognizes no obligation to be accountable in mission or in conversation. There is also danger in assuming that because pacifism is the stated distinctive position of our denomination, it is actually held by all members, and that they all understand it in the same way. In fact, many members of Mennonite churches are not sure that pacifism is an indispensable identity mark of the church.

We do not study this material *only* because it is a matter of denominational identity. The threat of war, the threat of violence within society, and appeals to violence as a tactic for social change are among the most prevalent threats to our culture, globally and locally; war, peace, and revolution are therefore concerns of everyone. We also study these problems because, more than most other moral issues, they are specimens of most of the main questions in ethical method. The question of when to kill and why serves as a test case for many big and broad questions of ethical method.

The significance of this study is reinforced if we take into account the fact that seminary students are church leaders in training. Leaders bear a special responsibility to know and articulate what constitutes the identity of their community. Mennonite churches face unresolved issues with regard to how our pacifism should work itself out in our time. Does it include a position for or against the death penalty? Does it include activist involvement with regard to corrections and prisons, or racism, or economic structures? What attitude does it imply toward the radical right? What attitude toward patriotism? What attitude toward noncombatant military service? These are unfinished questions within the main stream of Mennonite church membership. Leadership is and will always be needed. Basic understandings of why Mennonites are a peace church are articulated in different congregations in significantly different ways, and in the case of some of these differences, the people who hold alternative views would hardly recognize one another as belonging to the same believing community.

Another element in our taking account of the strategic importance of this subject matter is that it opens up challenging crossovers to other disciplines, in-

cluding social sciences, social work and social service, atomic science, political science, and secular history. The interdisciplinary encounters related to our topic are probably more challenging and more important than in some other areas of ethical discussion. The subject also intersects with other theological issues: the doctrine of the church matters enormously for what we do with the question of violence, as does the doctrine of Christian hope or eschatology. The nature of New Testament authority; the authority of natural revelation; the meaning of the Resurrection; the meaning of the Holy Spirit; the possibility of obedience, regeneration, and sanctification: these broad theological topics become immensely real in their impact when we ask, “What will I do about my enemy? What is the meaning of the cross for my life?”

The relevance of the topic for ethnic Mennonites

Any group of people, but especially a minority group with a peculiar identity defined out of the past and in familial-ethnic terms, will produce for its future members a mix of challenges and options. This is true for Armenian Orthodox, it is true for Missouri Synod Lutherans, and it is true for Quakers and Mennonites. On the one hand, that distinctive identity is an inherited culture. One is born into it. It is the faith of one’s parents. One has no choice. On the other hand, it incarnates a vision of renewal. It is a critical perspective, one that in the past has worked critically against church and world. From the perspective of radical renewal, those two thrusts—the affirmation of a given past into which one is born and the critique of what one has inherited—present a problem for anyone growing up in a minority culture. It is a specific kind of problem for those who grow up in a free church pacifist culture. One’s response to that heritage can vary from the most sweeping adolescent rejection, dramatizing how far the ethnic culture reality is from living out its ideal renewal vision, to the most apologetic identification with one’s parents’ or church’s vision of renewal.

Awareness of a tension between Anabaptist vision and Mennonite reality will be part of our agenda. The peace witness becomes a focus of that tension. It can have other foci. We could focus that same adolescent agenda on believer’s baptism or nonconformity or simplicity. Yet the peace witness is usually the place of bluntest encounter with the problem of how one moves through the process of accepting or not accepting an inherited culture and the critical vision behind that culture. The peace question sometimes serves as a paradigm or sample test case for whether to be Mennonite, some other kind of Christian, or Christian at all.

War or violence is often the point at which people become convinced, by reading the writings of nonpacifists, that their inherited position is not intellectually viable or not morally what they want to live for. It is possible,

without encountering those criticisms from outside, to be driven by the simple awareness that there is an outside world, that one has grown up in a ghetto, and to doubt whether that inherited identity can be useful at all. One can reach the conclusion that a mainstream view is more valid without reasoning deeply or struggling through it, and without great concern for intellectual clarity. It is more difficult than the rebellious adolescent thinks to define what is mainstream, even in terms of how widely it is represented. In our own neighborhoods, the statistical main stream is probably the pietistic and dualistic approach to social issues that we used to call *fundamentalist* and now call *conservative evangelical*. It is nonpacifist for a particular set of reasons. If one is more refined or more educated, one may identify the main stream as those who advocate taking charge of society, taking responsibility; its major representatives in our culture have been the Reformed tradition and the neo-Reformed Reinhold Niebuhr. It is possible to identify other main streams.

The background this course provides can enrich the student's readiness to move in any of a number of directions. If the historic peace church view is right, the student should become more able to justify it, communicate it, and clarify what it means for one's own obedience. If the historic peace church stance is unsatisfactory, the student should see more validly why that is and be freer to reject or correct it.